



## La Cité de l'Étoile à Bobigny. Candilis, Josic, Woods

Edited by Richard Klein  
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docomomo 50 - 2014/1

Book Reviews

Happy children playing on a cement block wall, against the backdrop of a dynamic architecture, a play of white squares in the spaces of a reinforced concrete frame, producing an impression of movement. This is the photo chosen by Richard Klein for the cover of his book on the *Cité de l'Étoile*, at Bobigny, built by architects Candilis, Josic and Woods (1954–63): youth, hope and vitality the defining image of this 727-home project, product of a national competition (Opération Million), a grand ensemble commissioned by Emmaüs to address the housing crisis affecting the most vulnerable.

The book is superbly assembled, providing a detailed documentary of the operation so as to understand and expose its architectural and urbanistic qualities. It tells the story of its life, its neglect and its hardships, and of its planned demolition avoided at the last minute through a “rediscovery” and recognition of its intrinsic value. The final chapter deals with the refurbishment now underway with the aim of bringing new purpose to the *Cité*. At a time when some of the most important social housing schemes in Europe struggle to avoid demolition — Robin Hoods Gardens, London and *Toulouse-Le-Mirail* to name but two — the publication of this work is of the utmost importance: it reminds us, if we need be reminded, of the cultural richness, intelligence and social generosity of post-war housing schemes of this type; it delivers proof that the conservation project at the *Cité* takes the qualities of the existing fabric as its starting point instead of destroying them. The most important architectural projects in the 21st century, quantitatively and qualitatively, are those to existing buildings like the *Cité*. Here we are made to see again what ought to be blindingly obvious: what sense is there in abandoning existing resources, cultural or economic?

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